

Edwardsville's High School Baseball Team Builds on Championship Legacy

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Edwardsville High baseball team, although losing many key players to graduation, will return many other key players who contributed mightily to the Tigers' second straight IHSA Class 4A championship as the team prepares for the 2024 season.

The Tigers last year went 33-9 in winning its second straight state title last year, a first for a program that has built itself into one of the best in the St. Louis area, as well as the state of Illinois. And so far, preseason workouts have gone well.

"I think our guys are really responding well to practice," said veteran Edwardsville coach Tim Funkhouser, who will guide the Tigers for his 26th season. "They're starting to bond together as a group out here on the field, and we're just trying to continue to develop our skills, and get our timing down as hitters.

"The pitchers are going to be able to see live hitters for the third time tomorrow, so we'll have a better understanding of where we are from there. We've had some great weather, we're going to take advantage of it today, and hopefully, get through it tomorrow, and

then, it look like the weekend will get us. I think it's going to be a fun season; we're getting to know the guys a little better, and know what their needs are, and also, what they do really well, too, their strengths."

As the two-time defending champions, many think that a big target will be on the Tigers' backs this season, but Funkhouser sees it as the players going out and competing against the game itself. It's something Edwardsville has done magnificently over the years, and it's something the players always strive to do.

"Well, our guys have done a great job over the years of just going out and try to compete against the game," Funkhouser said. "We play a very competitive schedule, we play in a great conference (the Southwestern), and we've done that for a while. We play in some different events, get at a little more to the season, as well. So we know that we're always going to be in a setting where we're going to be on a field against another good opponent.

"So, from our standpoint, we're just going to compete against the game. Get a pitch to hit, square it up, and try to make a play in the field, make a pitch on the mound. And we do that stuff each day, we'll be pretty pleased with our process, and the process will dictate what we're doing each day."

The returning players are those who have made those key plays and contributions for the Tigers over the years, and their experience will be a big part of the team and its fortunes for the upcoming season.

"We have a few guys that have been Integral parts of our team," Funkhouser said.

"We've got Lucas Huebner, who was one of our catchers last year, and did a great job behind the plate, as well as at the plate as a hitter. And we expect good things again from him as a returner."

Last year was a banner one for Huebner, as he hit .317, with one homer and 32 RBIs. Also returning is junior Joe Chiarodo, who hit .336, with one homer and 19 RBIs as a center fielder, and also did very well on the mound, going 6-2 in 13 appearances and having an ERA of 1.01, striking out 65 while walking on 23.

"This will be his third year with us, since his freshman year," Funkhouser said. "He's worked incredibly hard."

Other players to watch will be Greyson Rathgeb, a .255 hitter who drove home 14 runs in an increased role as the season went along. Senior Lucas Krebs also returns, hitting .309, with a homer and 21 RBIs in both the infield and outfield, and looks to be a key

contributor once again. Bryce Beyers also returns as a senior, and while not having much playing time last season, made the most of the opportunities, hitting .200, with five RBIs.

"He's worked on his skills," Funkhouser said, "and has done well so far."

Other returnees who made big contributions to the club last season include sophomores Augie Johnes and Chase Milburn, junior Evan Moore and seniors Max Waltenberger and Montrez West.

"Evan Moore got some time at the end and the postseason for us," Funkhouser said, "and he's improved his game, both on the mound and in the field, and at the plate."

Pitching will be very much a strong suit for the Tigers, with multiple players returning to the staff, including Chiarodo, Alec Marchetto, and Tyler Powell.

Marchetto came out of the bullpen mainly, with the occasional start, and pitched very well, going 2-1, having 13 saves, while having six starts in 14 appearances, with an ERA of 1.81, striking out 21 while walking 32. Powell also was 2-1 last year, with an ERA of 8.03, fanning 18, and walking 19.

Also expected to contribute will be sophomore Tony Eberlin, who came on late in the season and pitched well, going 0-1 last year, striking out 15 and walking 14. Both Chase Milburn and Hunter Baugh will also see significant time, both on the mound and in the field, as well as at bat.

"It's really fun getting to see where guys are," Funkhouser said, "what their needs are, what their strengths are, and ultimately, it'll play out. So, we're excited about it."

